

THE IMPORTANCE OF LOCAL AND INTERNATIONAL ENGAGEMENT IN BUILDING A "SUCCESSFUL" UNIVERSITY

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The notion of a 'successful university' is both comprehensive and evasive. A 'successful university' means different things to students, faculty, academic leaders, citizens, decision makers across various disciplines, sectors and countries around the world. Often success is in the eye of the beholder - or perhaps more importantly - stakeholder. Those who attempt to define, measure, and predict success need to be mindful of Einstein's famous 1902 quote - "Not everything that can be counted counts, and not everything that counts can be counted."

Capacity Building vs Status Building

Globalisation has had an enormous impact - both positive and negative. In response to globalisation there is an increased emphasis on competitiveness and higher education institutions have become preoccupied with being 1) internationally recognised and branded; 2) highly ranked in national/global league tables; or 3) categorised as a 'world class' institution. This preoccupation has more to do with "status building" rather than "capacity building". This paper argues, however, that in the end it is capacity building which is critical to the development of a successful university not status building. Status building is more closely linked to public relations and marketing which is often situational and temporary.

Engagement vs Recognition

Within the framework of capacity building for a successful university, this discussion looks at the importance of local and international *engagement*. Engagement is seen as more closely linked to capacity building while *recognition* is associated more with status building and branding. Engagement can be described as 'participation in a two way relationship which offers mutual benefits'. Engagement differs distinctly from recognition given that it places great importance on *participation*, while recognition relies more on *perception*. Both participation and perception involve different actors and stakeholders but it is participation and engagement which is fundamental to building capacity and becoming a successful university. On the other hand, perception by different stakeholders can differ significantly from group to group, sector to sector, or country to country and is often reactive and inconsistent. Perception does not make or determine a successful university; in the best case scenario perception can acknowledge a successful university. To be recognised as a successful university, an enormous amount of effort has to be invested in building the institution to meet its articulated goals and priorities. Local and international engagement is a key component to building and improving the institution.

Three Primary Roles of a University

The idea of a university is built on three primary pillars or functions. These include 1) the teaching and learning process, 2) research and innovation, and 3) service to the community, country, region and society at large. These are interdependent functions and thus, efforts to build a successful university involve being attentive to all three areas. Clearly this involves a diversity of aspects ranging from the quality of teaching, the student experience, expertise of teaching and research staff, research partnerships, local and international engagement, quality assurance, strategic planning, adequate funding, sound management and the list goes on and closely aligned with all three pillars is the notion of local and international engagement. Important to note is that these aspects of the university are not mutually exclusive, in fact they can be related, but more importantly they can be at odds with one another. This paper addresses the importance of strategies for being actively engaged both locally and internationally.

Growth in Number and Diversity of Actors

It is important to examine the different Levels and types of actors involved in promoting, providing, and sometimes regulating the local and international engagement of higher education. Table 1 illustrates the diversity of actors with whom universities are engaged. The categories of actors can be further analysed by examining the actors' their missions and activities - policymaking, regulating, funding, programming, teaching, research, service, advocacy, networking and others. It is important to note that actors often fulfil more than one role and that these categories are therefore not mutually exclusive.

Table 1. Actors and their Roles in International Engagement of Higher Education

Different Levels of Actors and Interaction	Different Types of Actors	Different Roles of Actors
Local	Government departments or agencies	Policymaking
Subnational	Non (or semi-)governmental organisations	Regulating
National	Professional associations	Education
Bilateral	Foundations	Research
Sub regional	Public/private educational institutions and providers	Advocacy
Regional	Private research centres	Funding
Interregional	Private industry and commercial entities	Networking
International		Research

Source: Knight (2014)

The number of actors means that a diversity of rationales and subsequent activities are involved in local and international engagement of higher education institutions. The multiplicity of motives and the fact that they are changing is what contributes to the complexity and changing nature of successful engagement of successful universities.

Local Engagement

What is meant by local engagement? Many aspects are involved. First it is important to note that local involves the immediate community/region or the country at large. It builds on respect of local cultures, values, norms, context and priorities. It contributes to building the health and well-being of communities and their citizens, social and cultural services, environmental sustainability and economic development. Keeping this in mind, local engagement means using diverse strategies to set up different types of partnerships with local, regional and national higher education institutions as well as governmental, non-governmental and private entities. The partnerships can relate to universities roles of teaching/learning, research and knowledge production and service, or it can involve broader level activities of advocacy, policymaking and standard setting.

One size does not fit all when it comes to university engagement with the local community. A cookie cutter approach' or standardised approach does not lead to building a successful university. It is necessary for the university to assess its priorities, needs and strengths and align them with the local context and conditions. Too often, in the current era of branding and profile, there is a temptation to align with the requirements of the league table rather than with the local, national and regional environment in which the university is working.

While both local and international engagement is of primary importance, more attention is given to international engagement, collaboration and partnerships in this paper.

International Engagement

International engagement is about developing productive relationships with other higher education institutions around the world, governmental and non-governmental organisations, think tanks, as well as the private sector and voluntary bodies. The diversity of actors and potential partners as identified in Table 1 indicates the breadth of opportunities. It is tempting for universities to be reactive to the plethora of international opportunities available to them. A key characteristic of a successful university is that it has a clear statement of priorities and goals and knows when and how international partnerships are appropriate and valuable. A successful university is proactive and strategic in identifying and prioritising its international partnerships, it is not reactive to the myriad of opportunities that present themselves.

A current and unsettling trend of universities is to collaborate only with universities that are ranked at the same level or higher in the world league tables. This is understandable to a degree but successful partnerships are often based on partners bringing very different but complementary interests and strengths to the relationship. In other words, there is something to learn from each or all partners and capacity building is the overriding goal not status building.

Higher education international collaboration and engagement has been around for centuries but the number and types of strategies for international engagement and partnerships have multiplied in the last two decades. Traditionally the international dimension of higher education institutions focused on bilateral student and scholar exchanges for teaching and research purposes. While this continues, there are exciting new developments in international engagement which include international research networks; collaborative education programmes; education hubs; mobility of students and staff; binational universities; multi-lateral policy dialogues; public/private innovation initiatives; among others.

Three Generations of International Academic Mobility

Worth noting are the three generations of academic mobility through international partnerships because it is no longer just the students who are moving. While students and scholars constitute the first generation of education mobility, academic programmes, institutions, alternative providers, and policies are also crossing borders. In fact, there has been an unprecedented growth in branch campuses, twinning programmes and double/joint degree programmes in the last two decades. More recently the third generation of academic mobility has emerged with the development of education hubs, zones, and cities. Table 2 highlights the three generations of academic partnerships based on mobility.

Education hubs are the most recent development and constitute the third wave of cross-border education initiatives and illustrate the importance of universities' international engagement with the diversity of actors listed in Table 1. Education hubs build on and can include first and second generation cross-border activities, but they represent a wider and more strategic configuration of actors and activities. An education hub is a concerted and planned effort by a country (or zone, city) to build a critical mass of local and international actors (i.e., universities, research and development centres, private industry) to strengthen its efforts to build the higher education sector, expand the talent pool for the labour market, or contribute to the knowledge economy.

Table 2. Three Generations of International Academic Mobility (Knight 2014)

	Primary Focus	Description
<i>First Generation</i>	Student/people mobility Movement of students to foreign country for education purposes and scholars for research and teaching purposes	full degree programme or for short term study re- search, field work, internships research exchange, collaborative projects, PhD su- pervision, co-curricular design and delivery
<i>Second Generation</i>	Programme and provider mobility Movement of programmes or institutions/companies across jurisdictional borders for delivery of education to local and regional students	Programme Mobility Twinning Franchised Articulated/ Validated Joint/Double Award Online/Distance/MOOCs Provider Mobility <i>Branch Campus</i> <i>Virtual University</i> <i>Binational Universities</i> <i>Independent Institutions</i>
<i>Third Generation</i>	Education Hubs Countries attract foreign students, researchers, workers, Higher education programmes and providers, R and D companies for education, training, knowledge production, innovation purposes	Student Hub - students, programme, providers move to foreign country for education purposes Talent Hub - students, worker move to foreign country for education and training and employment purposes Knowledge/Innovation Hub - education researchers, scholars, HEIs, R&D centres move to foreign country to produce knowledge and innovation

In 2012, there are only a handful of countries around the world which are seriously trying to develop themselves as an education hub. These include Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia, United Arab Emirates, Qatar, and Botswana (Knight 2014). In all of these hubs local and foreign universities play a critical role. The question pertinent to this discussion is whether the involved higher education institutions would be labelled successful universities. The answer echoes back to the first paragraph in this paper which points out that the definition of a successful university is both comprehensive and evasive and is the eye of the beholder and stakeholder. Those countries which have invested in the development of education hubs have clearly tried to recruit 'successful universities' in order to increase the attractiveness of the hubs but there is not only one model or concept of a successful university.

Different rationales, actors and activities characterise education hubs. Some countries see hubs as a means to build a critical mass of foreign students and providers to generate income as well as modernise and internationalise their domestic higher sector. Others want to be a hub in order to train foreign and local students and employees to be part of a skilled labour force. And other countries focus on attracting foreign students and workers, institutions and companies to build a vibrant research, knowledge and innovation sector to lead them towards a knowledge-based economy. In order to capture the differences among hub approaches and allow for a more nuanced understanding and exploration of education hubs, three categories of hubs have been identified and briefly described in Table 2. The three types of education hubs are student, talent and knowledge/innovation and therefore, the role and nature of the involved universities will depend on the type and purpose of the hub. Again, this demonstrates and emphasises that there is not one model of a successful university. It depends on how the university helps to meet the needs and priorities of its local, national, or international context and this varies significantly across countries and regions. However, a common characteristic of a successful university is that it is not "an ivory tower" but is actively and productively engaged and contributing to the community, country and society at large.

This paper has argued that 'capacity building' is more critical to developing a successful university than 'status building' or achieving a high rank in a global or regional league table. Secondly, capacity building involves 'local and international engagement' through productive partnerships at home and abroad and is fundamental to helping a successful university assume its role and responsibilities to society.

Three generations of international mobility and partnerships, including the current development of education hubs, are used as examples of engagement with a diversity of actors. Thirdly, it raises questions about the long-term implications and unintended consequences of placing undue importance on 'international recognition' over "international engagement" as expressed in today's preoccupation with international branding and league tables. Of course, they are not mutually exclusive but the appropriate balance is critical.

This opinion piece is based on a presentation made at the 2014 Eurasian Higher Education Leaders' Forum and builds on the following work of the author.

References

- Knight, J. (2014). *International Education Hubs: Student, Talent, Knowledge/Innovation Models*. Dordrecht: Springer.